

Dear SOMHELP Members,

Looking for a good multi-vitamin? Consider the following, and as always, please consult your doctor for guidance.

When it comes to vitamins, certain forms are easier to digest. A liquid is usually the best absorbed, a caplet (plastic coating with powder inside) is second, and a tablet is third. When it comes to certain vitamins, the chemical source of the vitamin also plays a role in how easily it is absorbed. Certain nutrients interfere with each other's absorption, and certain nutrients enhance the other's absorption.

That being said, I believe that while supplement manufacturers may claim that their vitamins are better absorbed, there is very little unbiased scientific evidence to back up those claims. That doesn't mean it isn't true, but please take all such claims with a grain of salt and do your research. Remember that they are in the business of selling their product to you. It is recommended to choose a vitamin/mineral supplement from a reputable manufacturer, and to choose one that has 100% (not more) of each vitamin/mineral. I personally don't feel that it is necessary to pay the extra price for "premium" vitamins, especially if you are mindful of what you eat each day and concentrate on getting nutrient-rich foods. A supplement is intended to be exactly that...a supplement to a healthful diet, not a "cure" for poor eating habits.

Some things to highlight:

Calcium is well-absorbed in the citrate form, but the other forms work almost as well. Make sure the calcium is bundled with Vitamin D. Calcium is a large mineral, so the pills may be big, and one pill may only be 1/3 or 1/2 of your daily needs. This actually works in your body's favor, because even if you could swallow 100% of your daily allowance in one gulp, your body would not absorb it - it's best to take it in several small doses (or drink 3 cups of milk or calcium/vitamin D fortified soy milk throughout the day). Do not take calcium at the same time as an iron supplement, they interfere with each other's absorption.

Take iron with a Vitamin C source, either in the supplement, or food (oranges, tomatoes, etc.). Sometimes iron will upset your stomach, so try taking your multi before bed, and Calcium/Vitamin D in the morning.

Vitamin D is critical to supplement each day, as our body does not store it well, and (especially in Montana) we don't usually get enough sunlight to manufacture it. I have seen some very convincing, reliable studies that are showing that a significant portion of the population is Vitamin D deficient, and the current RDI of 400 IU's is too low. I personally would recommend at least a 1000 IU supplement of this each day. Look for the D3 form - cholecalciferol. *Did you know? You can get your Vitamin D level checked at your health screening. There is an extra charge, but it can give you an idea of how you're doing. Just request it!*

Vitamin A is one vitamin that you can overdose on, but only the in the retinol form. If you are getting it in the beta carotene (the kind found in food) form, you don't need to worry about overdose - it might turn you orange, but it won't harm you. Vitamin A is an example of a "fat-soluble" vitamin. This means it needs fat in order to be absorbed. Consider taking an Omega-3 supplement (see below) with your multi-vitamin (which is where most people get their supplement of Vitamin A).

Omega-3 fatty acids - fish oil is the best source for this because plant forms (flaxseed, nuts) of omega-3 require a certain enzyme to convert it to the form our bodies need, and about 25% of the population lacks that enzyme. 2 mg of Omega 3 (both forms) is generally considered to be a good amount - what you would get from approximately a 4 ounce portion of fatty fish (salmon, tuna, etc.). Worried about mercury? Studies show that mercury (if it is present) adheres to the protein in fish. Thus, the oil is mercury-free...but not necessarily toxin-free, so make sure and get your supplement from a reputable source. Don't like "fishy burps?" Try the enteric coated tablets.

For more great, reliable information on supplements, please visit http://www.meritcare.com/news/speakers/cathy_breedon/pdfList.aspx.

Information contained in the SOMHELP e-mails is general in nature, and not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease. As always, you should consult with your healthcare provider before making any changes.

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